

PALM LITERATURE

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF CULTIVATED PALMS. Robert Lee Raffle and Paul Craft. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon, USA. 2003. ISBN: 0-88192-558-6. US \$49.95, hard bound, color dust jacket. pp. 528.

I always open a new book or other publication about palms with much excitement and anticipation about what I will find inside. I am always hoping for the perfect palm book, one that will provide an easily accessible, accurate, informative, descriptive, concise and well illustrated account of palms.

I was very pleased when I opened and skimmed through *An Encyclopedia of Cultivated Palms*. It is clearly the best popular account of palms to date. Comprehensive in its coverage, it is lavishly illustrated with over 900, for the most part, good quality, color photographs and has text describing nearly 900 species of palms. Slightly more than 500 of these species are illustrated with photographs.

The book has a preface and brief introduction and then presents the photographs, all grouped together from pages 21 through 240. Text describing the genera and species covers pages 241 through 476. Closing the book are a pronunciation guide to botanical names, landscape lists where species are grouped by cultural requirements and use, notes on seed germination, an imperial/metric conversion chart, a briefly illustrated glossary, a bibliography, a list of where the photographs were taken, and an index of botanical and common names.

Our knowledge of palms is vastly and rapidly expanding and a number of popular palm books have come out over the last 15 years or so. With few exceptions, each book has improved on the previous one. So I think we are moving in the right direction, and *An Encyclopedia of Cultivated Palms* continues this trend.

Unfortunately, there are a few errors in identification of some of the palms in the photographs. Because this book will be much read, it is important to have the photographs properly identified. These are the errors or other likely problems I noted:

Plate 41. This palm is *Areca catechu*, not *A. latiloba* as captioned, because the stem is too robust and leaves are too upright and rigid.

Plate 42. The palm captioned as *Areca latiloba* is probably not an *Areca* because the leaf sheath margins are fibrous and too open. Regardless, the correct name for *A. latiloba* is *A. montana*.

Plate 104. Although captioned as *Bactris militaris*, this palm is probably *B. neomilitaris*, a recently named species of similar appearance that differs in floral and fruit details, has whitish spines on the underside of the leaf rachis, is on the opposite side of Costa Rica and is easier to collect than *B. militaris* and whose seeds have been widely distributed.

Plate 111. Captioned as *Basselinia gracilis*, this palm looks like a *Pinanga* because of the united apical segments with toothed apices. It is probably one of the Philippine species.

Plate 114. Because of the several, well spaced, conspicuous primary branches, whitish color, and spreading nature of the inflorescence, the palm captioned as *Basselinia velutina* is probably *B. faveri*.

Plate 131. The specific epithet "*aethiopium*" is misspelled. It should be *aethiopum*.

Plate 133. Captioned as *Borassus flabellifer*, this palm is probably *Bismarckia nobilis* because of its intensely silver-gray leaves.

Plate 173. Due to the jagged leaflet apices, the palm captioned as *Calyptrocalyx hollrungii* is a *Veitchia* or *Drymophloeus* or in another genus of the *Ptychosperma* group.

Plates 200-202. Captioned as *Caryota maxima*, this palm is *Caryota gigas* or *C. obtusa* because the leaves are tightly clustered in a spreading crown at the top of the trunk.

Plate 229. The palm captioned as *Chamaedorea graminifolia* is *C. schippii*.

Plate 240. Due to the numerous, stiffly upright rachillae and elongated stem with short internodes, the palm captioned as *Chamaedorea radicalis* is *C. elegans*.

Plate 358. Because the peduncle is as long as the branched part of the inflorescence, the palm captioned as *Drymophloeus subdistichus* is probably *D. pachycladus*.

Plate 367. While I am not sure of the correct name of this palm, it is not *Dypsis ceracea*, which has moderate stems with abundant white wax and leaves with neatly grouped leaflets.

Plate 431. Captioned as *Gronophyllum ramsayi*, this palm is a species of *Archontophoenix*, perhaps *A. purpurea*, because of the leaflets in one plane, colored crownshaft, and basally flared trunk.

Plate 436. Due to the fruits clustered at the base of the rachillae, this palm captioned as *Gulubia microcarpa* is a species of *Areca*.

Plate 533. I doubt that the palm pictured is *Licuala triphylla*, as captioned, because the folds of the leaf segments and the teeth at the tips are too large and coarse.

Plate 601. Because of the clustered pinnae and spiny petioles, this palm cannot be *Neonicholsonia watsonii* as it is captioned. It is likely to be a species of *Bactris* or a *Calamus*.

Plate 660. By virtue of their spines, these fruits are of *Astrocaryum*, not *Phytelephas* as captioned.

Plate 668. This palm is not *Pinanga caesia*, as captioned. It is not even a *Pinanga* because of the absence of a crownshaft and the terminal leaflets lack toothed apices. It may be *Oenocarpus*, *Welfia*, or some Madagascar palm.

Plate 769. Although this palm is cultivated in California and Florida as *Rhapis laosensis*, it might be another species because its leaf has only a few segments.

Plate 780. This palm is certainly not a *Roystonea*, as captioned, but is probably a *Veitchia* or another member of the *Ptychosperma* group because of its jaggedly toothed leaflet tips.

Plate 786. Not *Roystonea regia* as captioned, this palm is likely to be *Wodyetia bifurcata* because of the large, orange-red fruits.

Plates 808 and 809. Although both are captioned as *Salacca zalacca*, there are some substantial differences between the two in habit and in length and color of petioles and spines, suggesting they are different species. The palm in Plate 808 may be an *Astrocaryum*.

Plate 866. Captioned as *Synechanthus fibrosus*, this palm is *Chamaedorea pinatifrons* because of the broadly sigmoid leaflets and short infructescence with small, yellow fruits.

While the photos are nearly all of good to excellent quality, several are underexposed and a few are not sharp, indicating improper focus or printing error. One frustrating aspect of other popular palm books was that photographs frequently only illustrated small, juvenile palms of some species (sometimes with just a leaf or fruits), which tells us next to nothing about the plant. This practice occurs about 15 times in *An Encyclopedia of Cultivated Palms*. A good example is the palm in Plates 55 and 56. While this palm could well be *Arenga brevipes*, as captioned, it could also be a *Wallichia*. It is a good example of a photo of a juvenile palm that does not present diagnostic features.

In some instances the photographs are superfluous. It is probably unnecessary to have three

photographs illustrating the habit of one species, for example, with *Adonidia merrillii*, *Aiphanes minima* and *Livistona rotundifolia*, among others. Eliminating one or two of these would free up valuable space for photographs of special features helpful in identifying the palm or for adding additional species.

While less expensive to print, gathering all the photographs in one continuous section of the book is annoying because it requires the reader to page back and forth between the text and photographs. The lack of detailed information in the captions about where the palms were photographed was also annoying. One must page back to the section on photo locations near the end of the book (even here information for some photographs was lacking).

My feeling about the text is that it is overly long and verbose although generally well written. Frequently the reader must wade through a long paragraph to find critical information about height or leaf size, for example. By employing a more abbreviated format, perhaps with critical information in bold or italics, these species accounts could have been shortened and tightened up considerably, thus leaving the prose for instances when the abbreviated format is inadequate, such as describing differences between similar-looking, easily confused species or other characters or features of particular importance.

Much of the cultural information in the species accounts is redundant. Nearly all palms do best in a well drained soil with abundant organic matter and regular irrigation. Likewise, most medium to large, solitary palms can be effectively used in the landscape as a single specimen or as groups of three or more individuals of varying height. Similarly, most understory palms need shade and protection from the wind, especially those with large, undivided leaves. These recommendations and similar information common to most species could easily have been included in an expanded section in the introduction or in a separate section on selection and culture of landscape palms.

Although synonyms appear in the index, the book would have benefited greatly with the more common synonyms listed with each species. For example, if one desires to know the synonyms of *Chamaedorea elegans*, it is necessary to scroll down the entire listing of *Chamaedorea* entries. Even then, though, synonyms of *C. elegans* listed under other genera will be missed.

Some categories in the landscape listings at the back of the book are useful, such as those that list palms for a particular function. However, I question the validity of other lists, such as

drought, alkaline, and salt tolerant and water-loving species. There is little research-based information supporting the composition of these lists. Anecdotal information can be valid or wildly inaccurate. If the authors had access to research-based information, they should have referenced it in the bibliography.

The notes on seed germination at the back of the book could have been shortened and tightened up significantly. Each genus listing informs the reader to see the notes under one of about 10 other genera. The eight pages devoted to this section could have been easily reduced to a brief discussion and table or list format without losing content.

Much of the saved space from these suggestions would have let the authors expand the brief

introduction to include significantly more information about palm biology and selection, culture, and management of these plants in the landscape. Conspicuous by its absence is information about planting, irrigation, nutrition, pest and disease management, and some other pertinent cultural practices. A book that will be so popular and widely read should contain this information.

In summary, *An Encyclopedia of Cultivated Palms* has no peer in the world of popular palm books, and should be on the shelf of everyone who has an interest in palms. By all means, buy it!

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